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A MONTHLY LETTER ABOUT EVANGELISM

LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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The Monthly Talk in the Reeperbahn district, Hamburg

The Church of Hamburg, the Free Churches and especially the Salvation Army have always seen the need for special work in the Reeperbahn, the well-known amusement centre in the district of St.Pauli, Hamburg. All sorts of experiments have been tried, in order to bring the message of the Bible to the people there. Social services and spiritual care have also been given; there is the Midnight Mission for prostitutes, and the Blue Cross for drunkards. The vagrancy and vagabondage among the population of Hamburg presents problems which are particularly difficult. Owing to the extension of tourism, the Reeperbahn is more frequented than before the war. Hamburg is the first large town through which Scandinavians pass on their way south. An observer is struck by the way in which the St. Pauli district, with its places of amusement and its brothels, attracts the tourist.

Since 1950 the "Männerwerk" of the Evangelical Church in Hamburg has been undertaking a special form of evangelism in the Reeperbahn. In the centre of the St. Pauli district, near the remains of an old bunker, there is a large car-park. The concrete roof of the bunker is large enough to hold 30 to 40 cornet-players. The attendants at the car-park kindly let us use part of the free parking-space, in return for a small charge. But with the increase in motor-traffic the problem is becoming increasingly difficult. However, so far we have always succeeded in reserving space for 400 to 500 people. Our meetings are always held with the permission of the police. They often have difficulty in directing the traffic on the side of the car-park.

REFERAT FÜR EVANGELISATION · STUDIENABTEILUNG · ÖKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN

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The practical arrangements. The police regulations do not permit loud-speakers on week-days after 8 p.m. The talks, therefore, have to be given between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evenings, which is a bad time, as anyone who knows the Reeperbahn knows. The attendance is largest between 9 and 12 p.m. During the past we have held a monthly meeting on the first Friday in the month from April till October. Friday seemed the best day to choose because it is pay-day.

For every meeting we took a definite subject, which was published three days beforehand in the secular and church papers. Our technical equipment included a transportable loud-speaker with two microphones, through which the pastors answered questions, and a portable hand-microphone for the use of those who wished to ask questions. The hand-microphone is passed round among the audience by one of our staff, as required. This technical equipment is absolutely essential for a meeting of this kind. The practical arrangements are very important. Members of Church Youth Groups hold up a large banner bearing the words "The Monthly Talk", two church-banners, and in September and October lighted torches.

At 6.45 p.m. the brass-band begins to play, and a few people begin to collect, to see what is going on. Punctually at 7 o'clock the speaker welcomes the audience, and we explain who we are, where we come from and what we want. The subject for the evening is announced and the form of the meeting is explained. In three or four minutes all this has been made quite clear, and a team of three people - pastors and laymen - is ready.

The pastor opens the proceedings by outlining the basis for discussion in six to eight minutes. The introduction is extremely important; it is worked out by the team together beforehand. It merely raises questions and describes situations. It paves the way for people to ask questions. But they don't always do so; no one wants to be the first. In order to avoid an awkward silence, we have placed a man whom we know in the audience, who has already prepared one or two questions. If no one else comes forward with a question, he asks to do so. This has proved a great help. Apart from that nothing is arranged, and the talks vary according to the subject. Sometimes the audience are in friendly agreement; sometimes they make violent attacks against the Church. Everything depends on the leader and the way he guides the discussion. The answers are still more important and still more difficult. They must be short, precise and convincing. Team-work has proved very useful. It makes the discussion more lively if there are a number of different people asking questions, and different people answering them. Experience has proved that the audience welcomes the opportunity to ask questions, and also to make accusations. Pent-up resentment, personal disappointments and annoyances are often expressed, and often

evoke cries of applause from the audience. Often they express generalisations and prejudice against the Church. This is the big opportunity for the men who have to reply. If they answer simply and convincingly, the audience always pays attention to what they say.

The main task of this evangelism is to destroy prejudices and false ideas and to confront them with the message of the Risen Lord.

Shortly before 8 p.m. the subject is summed up and a conclusion reached. The meeting closes with a few words of thanks to the audience, the car-park attendants and the police, and a closing hymn.

Follow-up Work.

For many years we have often talked to people until midnight, after the meeting had official closed. They were very ready to listen and learn and anxious to attend other meetings in future. We distributed printed cards to them, with the place and time of our next meetings. They were always held on Mondays. But through the fact that the week-end came in between, they lost their effect, and very few people came. We decided that we must strike while the iron was hot, and decided to adopt the following idea. Two minutes before 8 p.m. a large bus slowly draws up and stops just in fromt of the meeting. During the meeting a pamphlet is distributed bearing the words :

> "This talk does not end at 8 p.m. ! It will be continued at the Club-House of the Evangelisches Männerwerk in the Feldbrunnenstrasse 29 (Tel. 45.58.68). A bus will leave here at 8 p.m. for the Club-House. Do come with us !"

After a brief invitation has been extended to the audience, ten minutes later the bus leaves for the Club-House. This practice has yielded good results. The invitation has been accepted by between 20 and 55 persons. In fact, these talks afterwards have always proved the most valuable. One can talk more quietly and in a more personal way. People listen to one another. People of all age-groups and from widely different occupations visit our Club in this way. In most cases it has brought people into contact with the Church again after many years. The evening closes with an invitation to attend future meetings. A printed invitation is extended to everyone present reading as follows :

> "You are our guest today. If you wish to receive further invitations to our meetings, please leave your address with us. You can hand in this card as you got out, or send it to us as printed matter. Evangelisches Männerwerk Hamburg."

In the further follow-up work, a group has been formed which fluctuates a great deal. It has been possible to pass some people's names on to the churches. The task of the follow-up work is to inform people about the Christian faith and to introduce them to the life of the Church.

P.S. Some tape-recordings have been made of the talks on the Reeperbahn. They can be borrowed from the Evangelisches Männerwerk, Feldbrunnenstrasse 29, Hamburg, 13.